



## **Developers believe where there's a mill there's a way**

All along the Pawtuxet River, new life is being breathed into vacant, rundown buildings that long symbolized West Warwick's economic malaise.

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WEST WARWICK -- The flames that leaped from the Phenix Mill in March consumed the 183-year-old building and, along with it, some of the growing optimism that this economically depressed town was poised for a resurrection.

But the owner, James R. Alarie, has vowed to pursue his redevelopment project, promising that as many as 42 luxury condominiums will rise from the fire-ravaged debris.

All along the Pawtuxet River, developers are breathing new life into vacant, rundown mills that long symbolized the town's economic malaise. Now, for the first time since manufacturing largely evaporated, the mills promise to invigorate the local economy.

"I feel great about it," said Town Manager Wolfgang Bauer, who has labored for seven years to literally give away the abandoned mills. "I've spent a lot of time trying to move these things forward. They're going back on the tax rolls and it provides opportunities for businesses and restaurants."

In all, nearly 1,000 new apartments and condominiums are planned for mills in this 8-square-mile town. Most are expected to house young professionals and childless couples who will patronize local eateries and shops without draining School Department resources.

The expected population boom has already spurred plans to clean out the sewer line beneath Providence Street, and plans for the redevelopment of Arctic village depend on a new crop of affluent, mill-dwelling customers.

In July, Centreville Mill II LLC announced plans to spend \$15 million converting the 144-year-old Centreville Mill into an apartment complex. The company bought the 12.7-acre parcel in December 2004. Lincoln developer Peter Rosiello, the company's managing member, said he hopes to build 125 apartments in the mill's six interconnected buildings on Bridal Avenue.

Though the project remains in its early stages, it passed a critical hurdle this summer when the National Park Service placed it on the National Register of Historic Places. That will help the company obtain lucrative federal and state tax credits -- money it needs to finance construction.

The Centreville Mill, built between 1861 and 1909, is constructed of rubblestone granite and shale. Inside -- where 350 workers once labored at 31,000 spindles and 700 broadlooms -- the structures feature post-and-beam framing and heavily buttressed plank floors.

Along Providence Street, Baltimore-based Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse is well along transforming another colossal and empty building -- a longtime eyesore and fire hazard -- into 230 modern apartments and condominiums.

The \$80-million Royal Mills project, only blocks from downtown Arctic, will contain a half-million square feet of housing and a health club in a sprawling complex whose shattered windows and leaky ceilings once bespoke profound abandonment. "It's hopping in there. There's a pulse going on," Quentin Chafee, the project's development director, said. "It's going to come around."

Seventy-five contractors have been laboring daily at the formerly vacant site, installing a new roof and patching and sanding thick timber floorboards. Lately, tall aluminum-framed windows have sprouted on the red-brick facade opposite Bradford Soap Works. Inside the four-story building, 91 apartments are being readied for occupancy, with tenants expected under the 14-foot-high ceilings by Aug. 1.

Work will continue through the winter, as the company attempts to prepare 62 apartments in a second mill building for a grand opening in November. By the end of the project, Chafee said, Struever Bros. will also open a pub and 77 condominiums that will be marketed for between \$200,000 and \$400,000.

"They look spectacular," Chafee said. "It's really coming together quickly." This summer, Struever Bros., which also owns property in Providence, unveiled plans for a massive expansion in West Warwick.

The announcement -- of the company's plans to convert the 118-year-old Crompton Mill into 200,000 square feet of apartments, offices and retail shops -- fueled a sense among town officials that one of the Rhode Island's poorest communities could soon be a boomtown.

In partnership with Westerman Realty, which owns the 4-acre Crompton Mill site, Struever Bros. says it will spend \$30 million on a project that will energize a neighborhood that was dubbed "Velvet City" to honor the productivity of generations of immigrants.

Work has not begun. But Sam Bradner, the project's development director, said Struever Bros. has completed a master plan. The company is trying to get the mill included on the National Register of Historic Places and applications are being prepared for state and federal tax credits, he said.

"It's looks like we're in pretty good shape," Bradner said. "You have an existing building stock not being utilized."

A preliminary timetable calls for construction to begin in 2007. Despite the furious pace of work at the Royal Mills, Town Council member Leo J. Costantino Jr. can hardly wait.

"I couldn't be more excited," Costantino, whose ward includes the historic mill, proclaimed in May when The Journal disclosed the project. "This is what I really dreamed of."